

Issues in Medical Waste Management

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**Issues in Medical Waste
Management**

Background Paper



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Foreword

During the summer just passed, we witnessed a rash of incidents in which medical wastes washed ashore—from Maine to the Gulf of Mexico, along the Great Lakes, and elsewhere in the Nation. These and other incidents, which were the focus of intense media coverage, drew public attention to issues surrounding the management of medical wastes.

Waste management in general has become a common headline topic. We hear daily about declining landfill capacity, problems in siting new incinerators, and efforts to increase recycling. OTA's ongoing assessment of municipal solid waste management is addressing these issues.

As part of the assessment, OTA also examined the status of medical waste management in the Nation. OTA held a one-day workshop on July 19, 1988, with hospital, regulatory, and environmental experts to review the initial draft of this background paper and to discuss other areas of interest. The conclusions of those discussions have been incorporated in this paper.

The paper examines the adequacy of current medical waste disposal practices and the potential for human health impacts to occur as a result of such practices. It also addresses the need for additional research and databases, and discusses probable trends in future costs and capacity as new regulations are adopted around the country. Finally, the paper considers the possible need for further Federal involvement in regulating the handling, treatment, storage, and disposal of medical wastes.

OTA is grateful for the input from the workshop participants and other reviewers. The preparation of this paper would have been much more difficult without such support. As with all OTA studies, the content of this paper is the sole responsibility of OTA.


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NOTE: OTA appreciates and is grateful for the valuable assistance and thoughtful critiques provided by the workshop participants, advisory panel members, and reviewers. These participants do not, however, necessarily approve, disapprove, or endorse this background paper. OTA assumes full responsibility for the background paper and the accuracy of its contents.

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